

# Client Reviews Guide for Lawyers



Welcome to the Martindale-Avvo guide to client reviews.

In this guide, we'll break down the factors that affect the impact of reviews, how to get and maintain a steady stream of reviews, how to respond, and how to promote your reviews to attract new business.

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# Guide to Client Reviews

## Why They Matter & What to Do With Them

As a solo practitioner, a small firm attorney, or a practice owner, you know that reviews are essential. No business, small or large, can survive without feedback from clients. When those reviews appear online, it creates trust because they provide a glimpse into what it's like to work with you.

According to a 2019 study from BrightLocal, there are several important factors that impact your reviews: recency, the business' overall star rating, and how many reviews a business has.



80% of legal consumers say reviews are important or very important when hiring an attorney<sup>1</sup>



52% of people would not contact a business if they did not have reviews<sup>2</sup>



The average consumer reads ten reviews before feeling able to trust a business<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Understanding the Legal Consumer 2020](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Bright Local Local Consumer Review Survey 2018](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Bright Local Local Consumer Review Survey 2019](#)

## Getting Started

You may be hesitant to ask your clients to review your firm, but most research indicates that clients are happy to provide reviews — all you need to do is ask.

### How to Get More Reviews

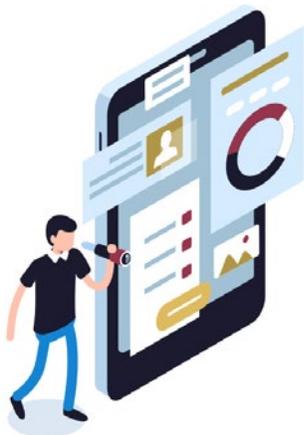
**Find the right opportunities** — The ideal time to ask a client for a review is after you've had a good interaction with them or when their legal matter is coming to a close. Don't ask in the thick of a legal matter or at the beginning of your relationship.

**Use multiple request methods** — Don't rely on just one way of asking for reviews. Include review requests in your emails, in your interactions, and wherever the process can easily be replicated. If you're at a large firm, make sure your team consistently asks for reviews.

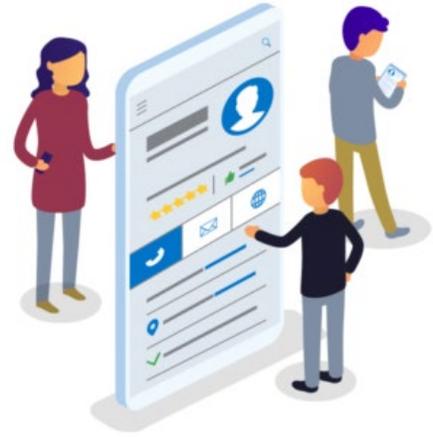
**Ask in person** — It's hard to turn down a personal request. During your face-to-face or video meetings, be sure to mention where clients can leave a review for your firm. Again, it's crucial to convey how important they are to your business and how much you would appreciate the review.

**Make it easy** — When sending an email request for reviews, be sure to include links to the places you want reviews. If you are asking in person, give clear and concise directions. Don't make clients search for you online, as it may make them less likely to follow through. (Helpful hint: You can even hand out a small card that includes directions on where they can go to leave you a review).

Most searches begin online — from finding a local eatery to a new attorney. If you want your reviews to impact your bottom line, you need profiles fully set up in all the places consumers can research your firm. Claim or verify accounts on Facebook, Google My Business, Yelp, [Avvo](#), and [Martindale](#) to display your hours, location, and other important information about your practice. According to the Martindale-Avvo 2020 Understanding the Legal Consumer report, online review sites are among the top 3 resources used by legal consumers to find an attorney.



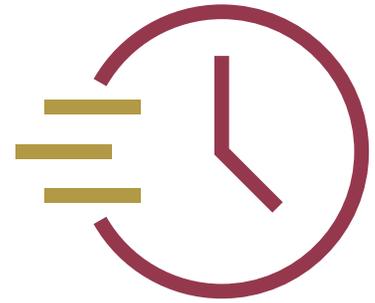
Some of these profiles may already exist whether or not you created them. That's why it's important to "Google" yourself and start claiming your profiles to protect against others who might try to represent your business online. There are an overwhelming number of sites that post your location and contact information. You may want to consider a tool like Avvo's [Review Manager](#) or [Martindale's Reputation Boost](#), that finds and reports them all, greatly reducing your time in managing your online reputation.



# Making Your Review Strategy a Success

## Recency Matters

Forty-eight percent of consumers only pay attention to reviews written within the past two weeks, which means you can't stop after receiving a few responses. Asking for reviews throughout your interactions with clients needs to become second nature, especially as you close out a matter. Do you send clients a note thanking them for their business? Or send out emails to your client lists periodically? Mention your profiles and how you would appreciate it if they left you a review. Make it easy for them to leave a review by providing links directly to your Facebook page, and online profiles such as Google My Business, Yelp, Avvo, or Lawyers.com.



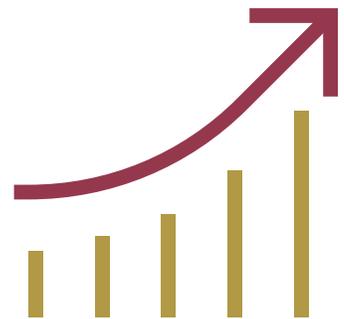
## Star Power

Ratings (often based on an average star rating) signal whether your clients are satisfied with the service they received. While your rating matters, it isn't everything. No business is perfect and legal consumers are savvy. Seeing a few negative reviews ultimately makes a company's profile seem more authentic. It's important not to focus too much on the negative, or let it deter you from seeking feedback online. When you've had a pleasant interaction with a client or prospective client, ask them to leave you a review. This way, you'll keep the positive reviews coming and offset any negative feedback you may receive.



## Quality and Quantity

Now that you know a steady stream of reviews and a higher star rating will inspire confidence in your firm, it's time to put it all together. The BrightLocal report ranked the number of reviews a business has as the third most important factor in choosing them. Like any other part of your business, focusing on your reviews has to be part of your overall business strategy. Consumers want to see a business that has lots of reviews and a high rating. It shows consistently good service, which gives them the confidence they need to reach out to your firm.



**When you've had a pleasant interaction with a client or prospective client, ask them to leave you a review.**

## Responding to Reviews

You can't guarantee that someone won't say something negative about you online, and an occasional negative review makes your profile seem more authentic. It also provides you with an opportunity to respond and show prospective clients how you work to resolve issues. The feedback might also provide you with helpful insight as to what you can improve for future clients.



77% of consumers expect a response to a negative review; 40% expect a response within 24 hours<sup>4</sup>



89% of consumers said they would be willing to consider changing a review depending upon the business's response<sup>6</sup>



70% of consumers changed their opinion about a brand after the company replied to a review<sup>5</sup>



Not replying to reviews risks increasing customer churn by up to 15%<sup>7</sup>

When you put the methods discussed previously into practice, you should start receiving more reviews. Before you respond, refer to your local bar rules.

Some jurisdictions have stipulated the following:

1. Responses should be restrained and proportionate.
2. Responses should not disclose confidential information (even if the client does so first).
3. Responses should not injure the client.

### The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

It's a great feeling to see a glowing review posted by a satisfied client. Don't forget, it's just as important to respond to a positive review. You're letting the reviewer know you saw and appreciated their message. It also signals that you value feedback, which can inspire others to leave reviews in the future.

What happens if a less than favorable review is posted about your business? Should you simply ignore it or respond to defend your position? Before you answer that, consider this: how you respond (or don't) will impact your relationship with the review. It will also leave an impression on future clients. If they see you actively engaging with clients, they're more likely to have a positive perception of you and your firm.

<sup>4</sup> [The Great Conversational Divide](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Marketing Charts, Responding to Online Reviews Can Have Significant Benefits for Brands](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Spiegel Research Center, How Online Reviews Influence Sales](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Chatmeter, Google Confirms Responding to Reviews Improves your Local SEO](#)

If a review contains incomplete or inaccurate information, proceed cautiously with your response. You don't want to reveal sensitive information about a client in your response unintentionally. The Pennsylvania and Texas ethics boards have suggested the following response (which you can edit slightly to make your own):

"A lawyer's duty to keep client confidences has few exceptions and in an abundance of caution, I do not feel at liberty to respond in a point-by-point fashion in this forum. Suffice it to say that I do not believe that the post presents a fair and accurate picture of the events." Encourage the reviewer to reach out to you privately to help resolve the issue.

### Here are a few best practices for responding to reviews:



#### DO

- Respond quickly. Try to respond to reviews within 48 hours.
- Let reviewers know you appreciate their feedback – good or bad.
- Empathize with unhappy reviewers while gently correcting any misinformation.
- Take the conversation offline if it begins to escalate. Suggest the reviewer contact you by phone or email to resolve the matter.



#### DON'T

- Ignore reviews. Good or bad, let reviewers know you received their feedback.
- Sweat the small stuff. Not all reviewers will be 100% satisfied.
- Get defensive. You can respectfully disagree with specific issues raised in reviews.
- Forget to say thank you.

Negative reviews often stem from miscommunication or misunderstandings. Staying on top of the reviews that get posted and responding appropriately allows you to be part of the conversation as you work to resolve negative feedback. If you find a review requires more than a quick response, it might be best to take that conversation offline. Suggest that the reviewer contact you directly through phone or email to resolve their complaint.

Let's run through a few examples to help you successfully respond to client reviews.

Say a client has written a negative review about you or your firm, which is bound to happen from time to time. By responding professionally, you can educate readers and demonstrate your commitment to client satisfaction, even if the client in question was unhappy with your services. The intent should not be to save face. You want to save THEM – meaning your current and future clients.

## The Save **T.H.E.M.** Technique

To respond effectively to reviews, you need to be prepared for them in advance with a solid strategy. This includes outlining how quickly you'll respond, determining if one or a few people within your company should approve responses, and an escalation plan for inappropriate reviews or messages.

This can be summed up with a strategy known as T.H.E.M., which stands for Timing, Honesty, Empathy, and Message. The save T.H.E.M. technique not only covers when to respond but what to say and how to say it. Here's how it works:

### **T = Timing**

Your firm should establish an expectation of how quickly it responds to all online reviews. For negative reviews, ideally, this timeframe would be within one business day of the review posting. Responding quickly helps prevent other users from piling on and posting similar complaints. For positive reviews, which are less urgent, consider a two-day turnaround.

### **H = Honesty**

If you mess up, 'fess up. Don't be afraid to admit fault where appropriate. Clients and prospective clients don't expect perfection, but they do expect a resolution. Nothing is sweeter to the ears than hearing "We apologize" or "I'm so sorry," and those reading your response will appreciate the honesty.

Once an apology has been made, offer a resolution whenever possible. Do not make excuses.

It is important to be honest for both you and the reviewer. Most review websites offer the option to flag a review should you find it to be inappropriate, inflammatory, outright dishonest, etc. Flagged reviews may be edited or removed based on the discretion of the review website.

### **E = Empathy**

Respond from the client's point of view. Whenever possible, eliminate the "corporate speak" (i.e., "it is our policy," "according to your agreement with us," etc.). Frankly, a client with a complaint doesn't want to hear that, and readers will chalk it up to a cut-and-paste canned response. Words of shock help to infuse a little emotion into your responses. "I'm so sorry to hear that was your experience" conveys in a way that is pleasing to the ear that the experience detailed in the review is not the norm for your business.

The reviewer, other clients, and future clients will be reading your response for years to come. What impression do you want them to glean from these responses? Are you a firm with heart, who sincerely cares about its clients, or are you a corporate talking head?

**By establishing your T.H.E.M. strategy in advance, you can respond swiftly to reviews and ensure you do not make any key mistakes — such as responding in an emotional way — in the process.**

## M = Message

Your target audience in this situation is not just the reviewer — you are also speaking to everyone who will read both the review and your response. Never get into an argument with a negative reviewer or challenge the person’s claims, as it will only reflect poorly on you in the eyes of potential clients.

From tone to grammar, it’s not what you say but how you say it. When writing a response, put yourself in the place of the prospective client reading your reviews and answer the question, “Does this response make me more likely to contact this law firm?” Consider having a neutral third party - a peer or friend - read your response to a negative review before posting it to confirm that it will do more good than harm.

**Complaints:** Convey that your goal is to resolve the concern as completely as possible, to accept responsibility if needed, and to ensure clients are pleased with their overall experience. Provide clarification if the reviewer is confused about or misstates the situation or firm policies — but do so in a way that does not fan the flames. If you find you’re unable to resolve the matter online, take the discussion offline.

**Praise:** Amplify the great things being said about your firm. Is someone happy about the way your team handled their case? Be sure to mention in your response something unique about your business (“The team has been together for over 10 years and we are a well-oiled machine!”). Potential clients read online reviews to learn more information about an attorney, so give them something positive to consider as they make their decision.

## Additional Elements of a Great Response

To ensure your message comes across loud and clear, every response should contain these three elements:

### **We are responsive and dependable**

This is an easy rule to follow. You should respond to EVERY review, even if it’s just a simple thank you. Select someone on your team who can periodically check for notifications of postings, monitor your review sites, and stay on top of postings made about your firm.

### **We are committed to service**

Make reviews an important part of your firm’s culture. Highlight positive reviews and talk through negative ones in team meetings. It’s essential that every team member understands what is being said and that everyone plays a part in securing your online reputation. In talking about reviews, ask the team what could have been done to avoid the situation from happening in the first place and what you can do to make sure it never happens again.

### **Our main goal is resolution**

When it comes to online reviews, do you respond or react? It’s hard to avoid reacting defensively to negative reviews. But remember the goal is to ultimately leave the reviewer with a positive interaction.

## Examples of Reviews and Responses

### Example 1

#### Client

“He is a highly motivated professional who cares about his clients and makes his clients feel comfortable. I felt since the beginning of my case that I could trust him.”

#### Attorney

“Thank you for the great feedback. I agree, trust is paramount for any attorney-client relationship and I work very hard to earn that trust by making sure my clients understand the legal process and providing transparency every step of the way. Should the need for an attorney arise in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me. My door is always open!”

### Example 2

#### Client

“I was very disappointed in the service I received. He was not knowledgeable about my case, lack of communication and I would not refer anyone to the firm because of him. Very disappointed and appalled at the service I received.”

#### Attorney

“I am sorry to hear your experience was less than stellar. It is always our goal to provide each client with the best representation possible. Client satisfaction is our #1 priority and we welcome the opportunity to address and resolve your specific concerns. Please contact me directly at \_\_\_\_\_, so I can better understand how we could have served you better. Thank you for taking the time to leave your feedback and I look forward to speaking with you soon.”

## Promoting Your Reviews

Once you've increased your number of peer and/or client reviews, use them to your marketing advantage. You want prospective clients to know that former clients think highly of you and would recommend you.

Consider implementing some or all of these options:

- Add a testimonials section to your website to showcase your reviews.
- Use your social media channels to highlight reviews from your other profiles, drawing attention to them with posts sharing exciting new reviews from your Yelp, Google My Business, or legal directory profiles. Include a pull quote and link so your followers can read it for themselves.
- Mention your profiles during consultations —let potential clients know where they can see what former clients have said about you.
- Consider framing screen grabs or print outs of great reviews and ratings and hanging them in your office for visitors to see.
- Include your rating in your advertising campaigns - "Five-star Rated Firm on ..."

## Takeaways

The idea of consistently soliciting feedback from clients is new for many lawyers. However, online reviews are here to stay; lawyers and law firms benefit by concentrating on acquiring reviews from satisfied clients. Firms who establish a reputation for being trustworthy and having great customer service will distinguish themselves online.

Take your review strategy to the next level with these steps:

- **Claim Your Profiles** — Make sure you've verified and updated your information on sites like Facebook, Google My Business, Yelp, Avvo, and Lawyers.com.
- **Ask For Reviews** — Whether it's face to face, via email, or over the phone, take advantage of positive interactions with clients and ask them to leave you a review on one of your profiles.
- **Respond to Reviews** — Take the time to thank a reviewer or resolve a complaint. Use negative reviews as an opportunity to improve.
- **Promote Reviews** — Once you've got the reviews, show them off! Post about your reviews on social media or create a testimonials section on your website.

## Martindale-Avvo™

Martindale-Avvo is the largest legal marketing network helping attorneys grow their practice through exposure to 25 million consumers monthly. We drive prospects to attorneys with real-time lead generation, online legal profiles, live chat, website services, and lead intake and management tools.

### OUR LEGAL MARKETING NETWORK

